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The ESL Scales is our document, so let's use it!

The use of the ESL Scales in a regular classroom by the class teacher is the focus of this case study. Working in a school with a very high non-English speaking background (NESB) population offers many challenges to teachers. Although this school is well resourced as far as the ESL staffing allocation is concerned, there are still children who would benefit from more English language support.

At Canley Vale Public School, the majority of students require ESL support. As they spend each school day working mainly with their class teachers, it is critical that each class teacher becomes comfortable in using the ESL Scales for assessing, planning and programming. This is best achieved by working closely with the ESL teacher, who can provide expert assistance and advice on catering for ESL learners' needs.



Appendices

- 1.1 ESL Scales Assessment
- 1.2 ESL Student Tracking Sheet
- 1.3 ESL Scales Whole Class Assessment
- 1.4 An ESL Scales Class Register

Context

I am an ESL teacher at Canley Vale Public School, which has 97.6 percent of its student population from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). The school has 775 students from a broad range of cultural backgrounds, the predominant ones being Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian. Canley Vale is in the Fairfield District of Western Sydney, with Cabramatta as a neighbouring suburb.

Canley Vale Public School is funded under the Priority Schools Funding Program. There is high unemployment in the area and the limited employment that exists is rarely of a professional nature. The community is quite transient with many large families settling in temporary accommodation before moving on. This results in our school having a fairly high turnover of students.

Most of our NESB students were born in Australia but come to Kindergarten with little or no English. The students use their first language at home and live in a community where their home language is used daily in business. The students who attend our school have very little, if any, interaction with the English language outside of the school setting.

The first day of Kindergarten is often the students' first encounter with the English language. This adds considerably to the usual traumas of the first day of school. For instance, how can a student be assured that his mother or grandmother will return when he does not understand what the teacher is saying? How can a student learn the routines and settle into an institution where all the authority figures are speaking in an unfamiliar language?

In the playground and even in the classroom the students mostly converse with their friends in their first language. Usually, the only time a student attempts to speak English is in answer to the teacher.

The housing in Canley Vale varies but is mostly apartments, villas or town houses. Most students do not have a backyard or outside area to play in and spend a lot of time indoors. Many students live with their extended families. In many cases both parents work long hours or shift work and the students spend most of their time with their grandparents.

These students have not experienced many aspects of what we might consider everyday life. For these students to learn English they need to experience the language in a meaningful context. It is very difficult to teach them, for example, about the sea if they have no knowledge or experience of what a beach is. They need to collect shells, build sandcastles, paddle in the water and explore rockpools for themselves before they really understand the story books that are read to them and fully grasp the language.

It is vital to provide students with the necessary background. As well as excursions and 'hands on' experiences, our students need picture talks and language games to help develop their understandings and vocabulary. Context building activities must be presented before introducing texts. The students' schema needs to be developed so that the text read to them is meaningful. A large emphasis needs to be placed on building up the field before beginning and during any topic.

How is ESL organised in our school?

Canley Vale Public School has eight ESL teachers who work across the school in a variety of ways including team teaching, parallel teaching and withdrawal. Each ESL teacher works across only one or two grades. The ESL team operates as a faculty within the school. This is a great advantage. The ESL staff have half hour weekly meetings timetabled. At these meetings issues are discussed, ideas shared and strategies developed to meet the needs of ESL students.

We really needed the ESL Scales

In 1995 all kindergarten teachers across NSW were asked to benchmark their students against the Early Learning Profiles (ELP). At Canley Vale PS our kindergarten teachers experienced great difficulty completing this exercise. For example, at the Foundation Level of the ELP in Talking and Listening the outcome for each student is:

Uses talk and listens when interacting in familiar, informal situations.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- name familiar objects ('it's a ball')
- talk with others about familiar objects
- talk about own interests
- talk to peers, teachers and other adults in the playground
- express feelings ('I'm sad', 'I feel happy').

(Kindergarten Workbook page 7.4)

As our students could not do this in English, they were difficult to assess accurately. They were only just beginning to use the small amount of English they had recently acquired. It was apparent that the ESL Scales provided better information to guide programming and teaching.

I began to experiment by using some of the pointers of the Writing scale as a focus during guided writing lessons. I wanted to see if the students were able to do the tasks indicated in the ESL Scales.

At first I chose a few pointers and used them to ascertain what students were able to do. From here I could identify tasks within the ESL Scales that the students could not achieve. This informed my programming, giving clear direction as to what I should teach next.

I also began to design proformas, trying different ways of recording information about the students using the ESL Scales. I found that the ESL Scales followed the natural progression our students experienced in learning to speak, read and write in learning English as a second language. This excited me and I wanted to further explore ways the ESL Scales could be used to program. I gained permission from the class teachers to plan the next unit of work using the ESL Scales.

How did I start programming from the ESL Scales?

I started by browsing through the ESL Scales, considering each pointer to determine areas where our students could perform and areas of difficulty. Looking at the outcomes and pointers I was able to judge the levels of our Year 2 students. This provided a starting point for my programming. The pointers included ideas for the unit and stimulated my thinking as well. Many of the learning activities in the unit came directly from the outcomes and pointers in the ESL Scales.

The unit of work I planned was used across the grade. Therefore, the class teachers gained some familiarity with the ESL Scales as they taught a unit incorporating ESL strategies.

The unit was a great success. The teachers were happy with the quality of work the students were able to produce. The students developed technical and scientific vocabulary to describe the animals they studied. The preparation of the unit and gathering the necessary resources was hard work but highly worthwhile in improving student learning.

Getting classroom teachers to use the ESL Scales

After completing the training program in 1996, our school ESL team decided to plan how to involve the whole school in using the ESL Scales by the end of 1997. From discussion with staff it was apparent that the area of most difficulty was in determining the level of each student, as it is essential to know the range of levels represented in a class before any planning can commence. The ESL team felt that once the students' levels on the ESL Scales were identified, class teachers could see where to begin, as well as the direction for future programming.

The ESL staff developed ESL Scales Assessment Booklets with observable activities to assess students. It was our intention that at the start of the 1997 school year the ESL teachers would assess students using the ESL Scales and report the results to the class teachers. Each teacher could then begin to use the ESL Scales to inform their programming and to help them design learning experiences for their students.

A separate booklet was developed for each of the ESL Scales, Oral Interaction, Reading and Responding, and Writing. A number of assessable pointers from each level of each scale was chosen and activities were suggested to determine student achievement at that level – A: achieved; D: developing; NYA: not yet achieved. (Appendix 1.1). By observing which activities the student could or could not do, the ESL teacher would be able to level the student on the ESL Scales.

As planned, each ESL teacher spent the first few weeks of Term 1, 1997 using the assessment booklets for Oral Interaction and Writing only to level all the students in the grade with which he or she worked. The ESL teacher was given time and space within the classroom to conduct some of the activities with each student.

From the results each student's level on the two scales was recorded on a proforma (Appendix 1.2) which was then passed on to the class teacher.

Some obstacles encountered

In retrospect, our goal of having the whole school using the ESL Scales was too big and unrealistic. The class teachers were not formally trained in implementing the ESL Scales nor did they understand what we were trying to accomplish. In addition, they were coping with the start of a new school year and all the pressures associated with a new class. When the ESL teacher handed them information about their students' levels, they were not sure what to do with it. In most cases they chose to ignore it.

This first trial of the assessment booklets at our school also highlighted other key issues in assessment. The students were assessed early in the year, before being taught anything. Assessing students individually was a time-consuming task that took about two weeks and really did not allow me to get to know them. In fact for some students the assessment task was our first meeting.

Some assessment activities were out of context from the class program, unrelated to the current class theme and taking place in a corner of the classroom independent of classroom activities. In fact the whole procedure, as we did it, ignored good ESL teaching practice.

Helping class teachers to use the ESL Scales themselves

I decided at this stage that the class teacher did not really need to know the level of individual students in the class, but that an overview of the levels represented could inform programming — ESL Scales Whole Class Assessment (Appendix 1.3).

For each class teacher the ESL team produced an abridged, photocopied version of the ESL Scales containing the levels relevant to their class, the ESL Scales Class Register. (Appendix 1.4). For example, one class may have students achieving between Level 2 and Level 4 in Oral Interaction and from Level B2 to Level 2 in Writing.

There is a lot of information in just one page of the ESL Scales and I could see this causing information overload for the class teachers. So I limited the amount of information they needed to read. Of the pointers which indicate achievement of an outcome, some are observable behaviours while others are assessable and therefore teachable. For example, for Reading and Responding Level 2.5 *'Respond appropriately to aspects of a story... in shared reading (by laughing, showing disappointment)'* is observable, whereas *'Match simple sentences or captions to illustrations'* is assessable.

In the class registers I highlighted the teachable pointers and told the teachers to ignore the rest. I suggested to class teachers that the highlighted pointers were what the students needed, examples of what to focus on in Oral Interaction, Reading and Responding and Writing.

I encouraged the teachers to include these highlighted activities in their class programs. The pointers I had highlighted could be used alone as activities within a unit of work or could provide an idea for a similar activity. Either way these activities would help the students to achieve the outcomes from the ESL Scales. They could be planned for when I was in the room or teachers could do the activities on their own.

In the ESL Scales Class Register I also included a breakdown of each level of Oral Interaction, Reading and Responding, and Writing. A teacher could get a clear understanding of what to expect from a student at each level. Teachers commented that they found this particularly useful when writing reports.

Future direction

The value of the assessment booklets could be improved through use in a real classroom setting. Assessment tasks should be related to the current theme the class is studying. Working with the whole class and their teacher in a familiar topic provides an opportunity for the ESL teacher to introduce the ESL Scales.

The school as a whole and class teachers in particular need to be aware of what the ESL teacher is doing. Classroom teachers also need some understanding of what the ESL Scales are and why they are being used if they are to be implemented successfully. This understanding needs to come first, before any levelling of students is undertaken.

It may be appropriate to introduce the ESL Scales to a few teachers at a time, perhaps just one grade per year. Unrealistic goals are discouraging for everyone involved. Sometimes it is necessary to be satisfied with moving slowly and this may be the best way to get class teachers working cooperatively with the ESL team.

Choosing keen and motivated teachers to work with is the best way to begin. Find out who is interested in using the ESL Scales, or someone you work well with or focus on a grade.

For the ESL Scales to be used, the teachers involved need support, preferably in the form of extra release time. Teachers need time off class to meet with the ESL teacher and plan how the ESL Scales will be used. Requesting more funds at a finance meeting for ESL teachers to train class teachers in the use of the ESL Scales is one option.

I still have a long way to go before perfecting the use of the ESL Scales. I am learning all the time by trying different ideas and experimenting with alternative ways to implement the ESL Scales. I am still learning how to work effectively with other teachers, how best to plan cooperatively and negotiate with my peers.

A few enthusiastic and motivated staff members from Canley Vale Public School are already talking about next year. These teachers are interested in my ideas and want to make use of my experience. It looks like an exciting year ahead and I will be able to refine some of the work I tried this year.

The process of trying out something new, developing a course of action and then refining what you have done, adapting it and trying to improve it is very worthwhile.

ESL SCALES ASSESSMENT

Name:	Class:	Date:
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A : Achieved
D : Developing
NYA : Not yet attempted

ORAL INTERACTION

Level	Pointer	Activity	A/D/NYA	Comment
1.	1.1 a) Follow simple instructions/ directions.	Stand up, sit down, line up, get that book...		
	1.1 e) Participate in simple social exchanges.	Greeting – How are you? General 'chit chat.'		
2.	2.1 e) Identify information from spoken texts.	Read a simple short picture book (e.g. level 1-4). Ask questions: How many...? What colour was...? Who was...?		
	2.1 f) Identify objects or characters from pictures in a known text.	Using the above text ask child to identify characters, objects, e.g. Point to the cow. Point to the house.		
	2.3 b) Respond to key words in a range of common spoken instructions (e.g. shut the door).	Receptive: robot game. Teacher instructs children in a circle: 'Shut the door.' 'Open the door.' 'Get me a pencil.' 'Give a book to...'		

READING AND RESPONDING

Level	Pointer	Activity	A/D/NYA	Comment
4.	4.7 d) Identify key content words conveying main ideas throughout paragraph.	Ask children to underline the key content words in a paragraph of a familiar topic.		
	4.7 m) Demonstrate understanding of simple similes.	Ask children to fit an appropriate word to complete the simile, e.g. as cold as... as warm as...		
	4.8 f) Locate a topic sentence to identify main idea of a paragraph.	Using a simple report ask child to underline the main idea of the paragraph.		
5.	5.5 b) Discuss motivation and emotions of character from reading of a story.	Children read a story about a character and complete a character study.		
	5.5 g) Find specific detail or information from a range of factual texts.	Children read factual text, then answer 'how and why' comprehension questions.		

WRITING

Level	Pointer	Activity	A/D/NYA	Comment
3.	3.11 k) Use simple phrases to express basic comparisons (the same as, bigger than).	Cloze activity – complete the phrase. Teacher writes sentences and children put in 'same as', 'bigger than', 'smaller than' etc.		
	3.12 a) Use knowledge of sentence patterns to form new sentences (base a new story on repetitive formula from a known story).	Read a repetitive story to children then write an innovation of the text.		
4.	4.9 a) Reconstruct a text (using notes or through discussion).	Group discussion of a short spoken or written text. Children then reconstruct text and write it down.		
	4.9 h) Write a simple explanation.	Read and discuss how something works or is made. Children write their own simple explanation.		

ESL STUDENT TRACKING SHEET

[illegible]

ESL SCALES WHOLE CLASS ASSESSMENT

Term:	Class:
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Oral Interaction		Writing
<p>The majority of the class is working at levels _____</p> <p>with some children working at level _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>The majority of the class is working at levels _____</p> <p>with some children working at level _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>The majority of the class is working at levels _____</p> <p>with some children working at level _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Target Children	Target Children	Target Children
<input type="checkbox"/> Referrals <input type="checkbox"/> STLD <input type="checkbox"/> ESL	<input type="checkbox"/> Referrals <input type="checkbox"/> STLD <input type="checkbox"/> ESL	<input type="checkbox"/> Referrals <input type="checkbox"/> STLD <input type="checkbox"/> ESL

AN ESL SCALES CLASS REGISTER

ESL SCALES WHOLE CLASS ASSESSMENT			
Term: Class: 			
Oral Interaction	Reading and Responding	Writing	
<p>The majority of the class is working at levels _____</p> <p>with some children working at level _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>The majority of the class is working at levels _____</p> <p>with some children working at level _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>The majority of the class is working at levels _____</p> <p>with some children working at level _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	

ESL SCALES LEVEL 3 - WRITING

Communication	Language and cultural understanding	Language structures and features	Strategies
<p>At level 3, a student:</p> <p>3.9 Communicates on a number of familiar topics through writing simple creative and informational texts in response to classroom demands.</p> <p><i>Evident when student, for example:</i></p> <p>Write simple creative texts (imaginative recounts, descriptions, narratives, poems).</p> <p>Write simple personal and opinionative texts that present a point of view (journals, statement of opinion, responses to a question).</p> <p>Write poems based on simple, repetitive and modelled language.</p> <p>Write conventional informational texts based on personal experience (science experiment, report based on classification activity).</p> <p>Write suitable captions for pictures and photographs.</p> <p>Write simple descriptions of things, events, places, processes or people.</p> <p>Write simple reports appropriate to different topic areas (on animals, land forms, levels of government).</p>	<p>At level 3, a student:</p> <p>3.10 Demonstrates awareness of common formats required of class texts.</p> <p><i>Evident when students, for example:</i></p> <p>Plan the format of a text according to its intended communicative purpose (a letter).</p> <p>Discuss the impact of different text formats on the reader (poster, exercise book).</p> <p>Discuss sequencing of events and ideas in own writing.</p> <p>Use key features of a spatio-temporal subject format (procedural headings in science report).</p> <p>Use some conventions for separating ideas or sections in a text (starting a new idea on a new line, starting a new section on a new page, paragraph).</p> <p>Present writing in appropriate format (use headings, illustrations, layout in final draft).</p>	<p>At level 3, a student:</p> <p>3.11 Writes a variety of simple cohesive texts, demonstrating a developing use of simple language and structures.</p> <p><i>Evident when students, for example:</i></p> <p>Use organisational framework in writing familiar text types (simple classification/description in reports, goal and steps in procedures).</p> <p>Write identifiable paragraph topic sentences.</p> <p>Write coherent sentences using some dependent clauses ('I can do anything when I am happy').</p> <p>Use simple time sequence markers when describing a process or event (first, next, at last).</p> <p>Use a number of common conjunctions to link ideas between sentences (before, after, because, but, when).</p> <p>Make expository statements using hyperbolic forms, it (there is, there are, it has).</p> <p>Use simple phrases to express basic comparisons (the same as, bigger than).</p> <p>Use and sometimes signal direct speech in writing.</p> <p>Use direct speech in narrative or dialogue with some appropriate punctuation ('He say no don't do that'; 'Is this the right one?' he asked).</p> <p>Use pronoun references with some noun/pronoun agreement appropriately describing people ('I yesterday the c We...'; 'Kangaroos meerkats. They</p> <p>Use simple phrases to enhance effect writing (huge instead of delicious instead).</p> <p>Write predominant and simple past (back on the mat burner).</p>	<p>At level 3, a student:</p> <p>3.12 Draws on knowledge of the writing process to plan, write and redraft texts.</p> <p><i>Evident when students, for example:</i></p> <p>Use knowledge of sentence patterns to form new sentences (base a new story on repetitive formulas from a know story, from written or spoken texts).</p> <p>Write first draft, focusing on meaning rather than accuracy.</p> <p>Revise draft after re-reading or conferencing (use or delete ideas, revise word order or choice of words, correct errors in spelling and punctuation).</p> <p>Plan before writing (by discussing ideas and possible options in first language or English).</p>

2. What to focus on in Writing.
(The ESL teacher can also identify examples of what to focus on in Reading and Responding, and Oral Interaction)

3. A breakdown of the levels your students are achieving in Writing.

A BREAKDOWN OF WRITING - LEVEL 3

At level 3 the student can:

- Write simple descriptions of things, places or people.
- Write simple reports appropriate to different topic areas.
- Write suitable captions for pictures and photographs.
- Use an organisation framework in writing familiar and previously taught text types (classification in reports, steps in procedures).
- Use simple time sequence markers when describing an event or process (first, next, at last).
- Use a number of common conjunctions to link ideas between sentences (before, after, because, but, when).
- Use and sometimes signal direct speech.
- Use pronoun references appropriately (The class went... we then..., Koalas are... they have...).
- Select suitable descriptive words to enhance writing (huge - big; delicious - tastes good).

A breakdown of all the levels that the class was achieving was included within the Class Teacher's ESL Scales Class Register.

